PRESS CONFERENCE SPEAKERS
December 10, 1992

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STATEMENTS
BRUCE LOEFFLER

Welcome and introduction:

Good Morning and welcome. I am pleased to see all of you here and thank you very much for coming.

First let me say that I speak for the members of Ground Zero, that I am attempting to express what the people in this room and what those who could not be here today wanted expressed. I speak for a diverse community of concerned citizens--both gay and straight, young and old, male and female, from every religious background, from every ethnic background, from every type of employment--a group of concerned citizens who have banded together as a result of the passage of Amendment 2. I also speak for those who cannot, out of fear, speak for themselves. Sadly, I also speak for some who are too sick to speak for themselves. For all of these people, today, I am their voice.

We feel shock and anguish, anger and dismay. The passage of Amendment 2 is a precedent with far-reaching implications. For the first time in the United States, a group of citizens has been singled out and constitutionally denied basic civil rights protections. When Amendment 2 goes into effect on January 1st, ordinances in three cities--Denver, Boulder, and Aspen--which had extended basic protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation will be overturned. Gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens of Colorado will then face arbitrary dismissal from jobs and arbitrary denial of housing simply because of their sexual orientation, and they will have no legal recourse.

Amendment 2 was never about "special rights" for gays and lesbians; rather it was about the special right to discriminate against gays and lesbians. As the first step in the religious right's anti-gay and -lesbian agenda, Amendment 2 is quite simply the beginning of gay "ethnic cleansing." They do not want us to exist; they certainly do not want us to be visible. But we will be visible. We will come forward and speak out. We will educate the Colorado voters about the injustice that has been done. And we will work to counter the climate of hate exacerbated by the barrage of insidious misinformation that was part of the campaign to pass Amendment 2.

Before we go on to discuss Ground Zero's objectives and immediate plans, let me first introduce Harvey Joyner, the minister of the Unitarian Church, who has a few comments about why this press conference is taking place here.

Ground Zero's history and name

As a result of the passage of Amendment 2, a group of concerned citizens in Colorado Springs came together in a series of

town meetings to formulate a response to Amendment 2. As a result of this grassroots, town meeting process, involving more than 400 people, an organization called Ground Zero was formed.

We chose the name Ground Zero because we recognized that we live in Colorado Springs, the birthplace of Amendment 2--"ground zero," the epicenter of hate. We also chose this name to remind us that Colorado Springs was "ground zero" during the Cold War, because of NORAD. The Cold War reminds us that things once unleashed lead to consequences that are unknowable, unforeseeable and unpredictable. For instance, the development of nuclear power led rapidly to the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and to the ever present nuclear threat. Similarly, the hate unleashed as part of the campaign to pass Amendment 2 has unpredictable consequences.

To discuss Ground Zero's objectives and immediate plans, let me introduce Katherine Pease.

While it is obvious that Amendment 2 is a matter of grave concern for the gay and lesbian community, it is also a issue of importance for the straight community. As a result, many non-gay people have joined with us is forming Ground Zero. Let me introduce one of those people, Rob Gordon.

The misinformation playing on insidious stereotypes that was used in the campaign to pass Amendment 2 has exacerbated the climate of hate in Colorado. As a result, as most of you know, harassing and threatening phone calls have been received in the hundreds by the Gay and Lesbian Community Center and by gay bars in Denver. Bomb threats were received at the Community Center and at the Tattered Cover Bookstore. In fact, there has been a documented three-fold increase in hate crimes against gays and lesbians as a result of the election. Colorado Springs has not been immune to this. To explain, let me introduce Richard Skorman.

Given the level of misinformation, fear and ignorance in this society about homosexuality, it is not surprising that many gay men and lesbians choose to lead their lives quietly in the closet. The people in this room with bags over their heads exemplify the sense of isolation and separation from society that closeted gays experience. The campaign to pass Amendment 2 and its ultimate passage have been a wake up call, an alarm signal. As a result, many previously invisible gay men and lesbians are breaking down closet doors and coming forward to speak out. Let me introduce one such person.

Katherine Pease

GROUND ZERO: OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS

Ground Zero's primary objectives include the establishment of basic civil rights for gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people and the full inclusion of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people in society. By full inclusion we mean that gays and lesbians will be free to be who they are without fear of losing their jobs, without fear of being denied housing, without fear of being denied public accommodation. Full inclusion entails the annihilation of socially sanctified discrimination against gays and lesbians, including discrimination within our families; it means that we shall not fear telling our parents and our brothers and sisters that we are gay and risk the possibility of our families disowning us because it might not look good to the neighbors. Full inclusion means that we shall not walk down the street in fear of harassment. Full inclusion means that gays and lesbians shall exist in society as freely as heterosexuals do and have access to the same basic human rights all people are guaranteed under the U.S. constitution. Not special rights. Just basic human rights. Those rights which will be denied to us as long as Amendment 2 is in place.

GROUND ZERO realizes and intends to make public the fact that if gays and lesbians cannot "file a claim of discrimination", as it says in black and white in amendment 2, then discrimination is legal. When you're discriminated against you need and deserve the right to file a claim of discrimination. This is simply not possible with the passage of Amendment 2. It's not about granting special rights. It's about the very special right to discriminate against a certain group of people.

Therefore Ground Zero will fight to nullify amendment 2. We will help other organizations in other states which will be battling similar legislation in their fight to prevent legalized discrimination. We will work in coalition with local and national minority groups to bring to the forefront the connections between Amendment 2, homophobia, racism, classism, sexism, and other isms. GROUND ZERO believes that all forms of discrimination are unacceptable and will not end its struggle until all forms of discrimination are terminated; GROUND ZERO will work with other minority organizations locally and nationally to this end.

GROUND ZERO will employ a number of tactics to achieve these goals. First, we will fully support and encourage the growing, powerful national boycott of Colorado. We especially believe that the focus of the boycott must be Colorado Springs as this is the birthplace of Amendment 2. We most emphatically, however, do not see the boycott of Colorado as a form of punishment. Rather, Colorado is being boycotted in order to galvanize national public sentiment and to give people across the country a way to express their anger and disgust at a state which legalizes intolerance and discrimination. It is a way of telling the country and other states that if they pass similar legislation, they too will become the subject of economic sanction and will become nationally regarded as another "hate state."

Second, we will carry out our tasks through an active education campaign. In particular, the focus of the educational effort will be to counter the grossly inaccurate and fear-inducing campaign used by the initiators of Amendment 2, a campaign which portrayed gays and lesbians as subhuman. GROUND ZERO believes it is dangerous to let such misinformation remain unchallenged.

GROUND ZERO intends to be highly visible in its campaign efforts and is currently working to organize a national gay and lesbian march on Colorado Springs. This event will be well publicized and carefully orchestrated and will not in any way conflict with the philosophies of the boycott.

GROUND ZERO will focus national attention on Colorado Springs until Amendment 2 is nullified and the city makes a true commitment to ending all forms of discrimination and intolerance.

STATEMENT
ROB GORDON

My name is Rob Gordon.

I stand before you today without any of the usual credentials associated with a press conference speaker.

I am not a civic leader, nor a religious leader, nor a political or financial mover and shaker.

I stand before you today as simply a citizen of Colorado Springs.

In many respects I am an ideal candidate for inclusion in two groups responsible for our presence here today-- Colorado for Family Values and Focus on the Family.

I am a straight, white, Christian male, married with two young children.

So with attributes such as these--in some people's minds antithetical to cause of **GROUND ZERO**-why do I stand shoulder to shoulder with my gay and lesbian friends on this podium?

Let me tell you why.

I stand for truth in the face of a CFV campaign replete with deception and misinformation that depicted gays and lesbians as subhuman.

I stand for justice in the face of a CFV campaign which violated the most basic sense of justice by depriving members of our community--and I mean this in the broadest sense--of fundamental civil rights.

I stand for tolerance in the face of a CFV campaign that inspired fear and fostered grave intolerance and disrespect.

And, finally, I stand for the message of love and compassion as taught to us in the Gospel in the face of a CFV campaign that engendered such fear, resentment and misunderstanding that its only logical result is hate.

I refuse to remain silent in the face of falsehood.

I refuse to remain silent in the face of injustice.

I refuse to remain silent in the face of intolerance.

And I refuse to give over my Bible and my Gospel to a radical fringe of Christianity that misuses, abuses and perverts its message into one of condemnation and punishment.

I am here today to call on others like me to make the same adamant refusals.

I don't care if you think homosexuality is immoral. I don't care if you think it is the result of nature or nurture. I don't care if you think it is a choice or a predetermined orientation.

Your opinion on these issues has no bearing on how you answer the following questions:

Are you willing to deny fellow human beings--with the same range of emotions as yourself, with the same hopes and dreams, with the same daily struggles on the job or in relationships with people they care about--are you willing to deny these people rights as basic as a place to work or live?

Are you willing to give an employer or landlord the freedom to look a person in the eye and say: "You are out because you are gay?"

Unfortunately, I ask this question too late. Amidst all the deception and misinformation that preceded the election, the debate on Amendment 2 never focussed on this question.

As a result, the people of Colorado voted to remove basic civil rights.

Yes, the last clause of Amendment 2 does this. Read the Amendment carefully. Skip the special rights rhetoric and go straight to the last clause.

So now the time has come to refocus the question and fight the falsehood, injustice and intolerance that led us to this place.

That is why **GROUND ZERO** has been born.

And that is why I stand here today.

December 10, 1992
Colorado Springs, CO

Harassment Since the Election at Poor Richards - Dec. 10, 1992

I am Richard Skorman, the owner of Poor Richards Bookstore and Restaurant -- part of a complex of businesses that also includes a movie theater and espresso bar in the 300 block of North Tejon St.

Since the election, we have received 14 harassing phone calls concerning gays and lesbians. Some of the calls have been general in nature: calls like "You faggot lovers" and "We are going to kill you f___in faggots". Others have been more specific, asking for Richard and saying that "I know when you go to your car at night and I am going to get you"

Also, since the election, we have had one example of anti-gay [redacted] graffiti and we had the glass broken in the front door Poor Richard's Restaurant Thanksgiving night. The person who broke the glass called soon after to let us know that "you f___in faggot lovers will have a plate glass broken window next."

We aren't sure how many different people are responsible for the calls or vandalism because they have talked to a different Poor Richard's employee or owner almost every time he or she has called. One call was from a woman, the rest were male voices.

We can only guess why Poor Richards has become a target since the election. It could be that we held an election eve "No on 2" party at the restaurant that was publicized in the media the next day.

Maybe its because Poor Richards has approximately 10 gay and lesbian employees out of the 30 or so employees and owners who work in the complex. I say approximately because I don't know the sexual orientation of all who work in the Poor Richards complex and don't really care.

Maybe we have become a target because we allow "No on 2" groups to meet at the restaurant. As you probably already know, because of our casual atmosphere, Poor Richards has taken on the role as a downtown community center of sorts. We have a large bulletin board and at the restaurant, we encourage the facility to be used by as many groups as possible. We regularly allow Poetry West, the NAACP, celtic, bluegrass and physically disabled groups, as well as "No on 2" groups to meet at the restaurant. In fact, Focus on the Family executives and staff often meet at Poor Richards for coffee or lunch as well.

Although we aren't particularly frightened by the harassment and vandalism at Poor Richards, what concerns me, is the fact that the it has occurred only since the election. I personally wonder if the campaign and passage of Amendment 2 now gives a license to those in our community who are prejudiced against gays and lesbians to express their hateful feelings?

Richard Skorman, Poor Richards 578-5549

STATEMENT for PRESS CONFERENCE
PATRICIA HEWITT

One month ago I never thought I would be "coming out" on national television. I taught high school for 10 years. I was a respected teacher and member fo my community. But I always lived in fear that parents or students would find out I was a lesbian and that because of their fears I would be denied the job I love most, teaching.

Now I work for a large computer company. My spouse and I have lived quietly in Colorado Springs for 12 years. We own our home in a middle class neighborhood. We are responsible and trusted members of that neighborhood.

I have been an invisible lesbian for 20 years. But I cannot remain invisible any longer. Amendment 2 has taken away my basic civil rights. It will allow my employer to fire me, restaurants to deny me service, just because of my sexual orientation. And I will have no legal recourse to the discrimination.

I believe Amendment 2 passed in Colorado because of 2 factors: first, because voters were confused by the wording of the Amendment; second, because the people of Colorado did not know the people they were voting against. They were shown stereotypes of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and they believed the stereotypes. They were afraid of the people Colorado for Family Values (CFV) presented to them.

Well, I think they believed those stereotypes because we lesbian, gay and bisexual people have not let them know who we are. We have kep ourselves invisible out of fear. I can't do that any longer. I am coming out because I have a responsibility to let people know who lesbian, gay and bisexual people really are. We are good neighbors, we are productive employees in business, we are loving, concerned parents at school meetings, we are active contributing citizens serving in cities, towns and states all over this country.

So I feel I have to come out and join the efforts of Ground Zero to give the citizens of my state and other states a different idea about gay people than the one CFV portrays. I have heard that my precinct was one of the few in Colorado Springs which voted against the amendment. I'd like think that it is partly because my neighbors trusted me when I asked them to vote no...trusted me because they have known me for years not as a lesbian, but as a neighbor and a friend.

There is no justifiable reason why any person heterosexual or homosexual should be denied basic civil rights because of his or her sexual orientation. Yet this has happened in Colorado. I believe it happened because of misunderstanding and fear created by groups like CFV.

Coming out like this is frightening. It makes me a target for obscene phone calls, my property is in danger, I have been harassed at work. I may become a target for "gay ethnic cleansing." But I have to speak out for my gay, lesbian and bisexual sisters and brothers who work today as teachers, in health care and in the military, some of whom are in this room with their faces hidden. They fear for their jobs, their homes and their children.

All of us who truly believe in equal rights for all people cannot be silent and invisible any longer.